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THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA: ITS ORGANIZATION

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The destiny of the commonwealth depends upon the training of its youth. The public-school system is the source of the major portion of this training. It obtains, then, that the school system of the great state of Oklahoma, "the new star on the flag," should be systematically organized and adequately maintained.

Section 13 of the Enabling Act provides that "the laws in force in the territory of Oklahoma, as far as applicable, shall extend over and apply to said state until changed by the legislature thereof." And section 21 of the same act reads:

and the officers of the state government formed in pursuance of said constitution as provided by said constitutional convention, shall proceed to exercise all the functions of such state officers; and *all laws in force* in the territory of Oklahoma at the time of admission of said state into the Union shall be in force throughout said state, except as modified by this act or by the constitution of the state, and the laws of the United States not locally inapplicable shall have the same force and effect within said state as elsewhere within the United States.

I take it for granted, therefore, that after the adoption of the constitution, the election of state and county officers, the present Oklahoma school laws will be the laws of that portion now known as Indian Territory as well as that portion now known as Oklahoma Territory, until such time as the legislature of the new state shall change the same. In passing, let me plead with all the teachers and patrons of the new state of Oklahoma to wipe out this imaginary line between the two territories. Let us forget it entirely. Already it has caused, and is causing, unnecessary trouble. We will be one, with common interests, for weal or woe. Let us be undivided, harmonious, fraternal, in all our rich young life.

Among other officers the laws will doubtless provide for the election of a county superintendent in each county. By the present Oklahoma laws it is made the duty of the county superintendent of public instruction

to divide the county into a convenient number of school districts, and to change such districts when the interests of the people may require it, by making them conform to existing topographical and physical conditions; and to appoint the time and place for the said first district meeting, which shall then proceed as by law required. Such superintendent shall number school districts when they are formed, and he shall keep in a book for that purpose a description of the boundaries of each school district and part of district in his county, with a plat of same, date of organization, date and full record of all changes of boundaries, and a list of district officers in his county, the date of election or appointment, and the time the term of each is to expire.

The special district meeting shall elect officers, and transact such business as is prescribed by law for regular school district meetings.

The school district, under the Oklahoma system, is usually three miles square, thus containing nine square miles of area.

The school district is deemed duly organized when the officers are elected, and have qualified, and signed an acceptance of office. The school district is a body corporate, and possesses the usual powers of a corporation for public purposes.

The first district meeting may appoint a chairman, elect officers, designate a site for the district schoolhouse, vote an annual tax sufficient for the various school purposes, direct the sale of any school property, determine the length of time the school shall be taught, *when* such school shall be taught, and whether the money shall be used for summer or winter term of school.

The said school board shall purchase, or lease, a site as designated by the voters; hire, purchase, or build a schoolhouse as directed; look after the care and keeping of the same; provide the necessary supplies and furniture; make necessary rules and regulations; hire a qualified teacher, and provide for the opening of school.

Thus the school is started. The machinery is simple. It

makes little difference whether one school district is to be formed in one county, or whether one hundred districts are to be formed in each of as many counties. The machinery is the same. It is true that it will require a little more work on the part of the superintendents. It is also true that many tantalizing and nerve excruciating petty difficulties, barriers to be surmounted, will arise; these are to be expected, endured, settled, and the work should proceed.

The Oklahoma schools are already organized and in running order. I do not regard it as a difficult task to organize the schools of Indian Territory. If the state officers take charge June 1, I can see no good reason why Indian Territory ought not to have the majority of its schools running the school year of 1907 and 1908. The schools in the cities are already fairly well organized and are doing good work. Our intelligent citizenship will soon establish the rural or district schools.

If the Oklahoma system is followed, school district should be made as large as possible. The greatest detriment to our school system is the small district. It is a relic of the past, and should be so recognized by our people. School district boundaries should be on half-section lines, so that schoolhouses may be properly located at the crossroads, and not in the middle of a section of land.

In the newly organized district, district boards should be conservative in expending the public money the first year or two, and not mortgage the future for a period of twenty years, and make it impossible to have good schools.

In the election of county superintendents great care should be exercised to elect only highly qualified, self-sacrificing, professional men. The schools should be organized by schoolmen who know from training and experience the school needs. The school district officers selected should be intelligent, conservative men of affairs, who are able to see beyond personal greed.

If the constitutional convention, now sitting, makes not other provisions, thus will our schools be organized. However, I feel that this convention should take some decisive action and provide for the introduction of the township system of schools in Indian

Territory, instead of the present Oklahoma district system. If the constitutional convention does not act, it will be too late for the first legislature to move, as the Oklahoma district system will be fastened on to Indian Territory.

The township system is so much superior, less expensive, affords the graded school more highly trained teachers, longer school terms, a better body of directors, more satisfactory schoolhouses, better school equipment, and larger and richer libraries. I hope that the teachers throughout the new state of greater Oklahoma will take a bold stand for the township school system, and will use all of their influence with the members of the convention to establish this system in Indian Territory, and to make a provision whereby the Oklahoma school district may gradually be consolidated, and all pupils transported to and from school.

The common school is the foundation of the school system, "the university of the masses." After this is provided for, adequate provision should be made so that every boy and girl may attend a good high school within a reasonable distance of his home. The township system will provide the necessary secondary instruction. One, two, three, or four years of high-school work may be done in the township school. However, if the pupil cannot get this work in his district school, a high school should be established in every county, maintained at state and county expense, where the boy or girl may receive this training.

Oklahoma's high-school system is the weak link in her educational chain. A good system of high schools in the new state will strengthen our educational system more than anything else. The present constitutional convention would build for itself an everlasting monument, if it were to establish a county high school in every county in the new state.

Having established the rural school and the high school, it is then time to establish the state institutions of higher learning. Ordinarily, in the history of America, the custom has been to found the higher institution first and the common school last. This is wrong. We now have plenty, if not a superfluity, of higher educational institutions. Too much work done by them

should be done in the lower schools. They should be confined to their appointed fields, and should not attempt to take the place of other needed schools.

Usually these state institutions are conceived and fostered in the mind of the real-estate boomer, for personal ends, rather than to satisfy the real needs of the people. Let us divorce ourselves from the usual historical custom, and build our schools to satisfy the actual needs of the pupils. Let us found our rural school, then the high school, then the institution of higher learning. It is understood, of course, that the articulation between these schools will be perfect; more properly, they are simply divisions of one great public-school system made for the purpose of intelligent discussion.

Many additional problems in the matter of organization will present themselves. Among others may be mentioned the installation of a satisfactory system of taxation, the passing of an effective compulsory educational law, a plan for the certification of teachers, the adoption of modern textbooks, the inauguration of a separate school system, the outlining of an adequate system of supervision, and the arrangement of the course of study. Already the so-called "Nationalized Illinois Course of Study" has been adopted in the two territories, and will certainly be continued in the new state. It is probably the most perfect course of study yet outlined, and has proved eminently satisfactory.

The present system of supervision in Oklahoma, consisting of a state board of education, a state superintendent, city superintendents, and county superintendents, has stood the test of years, and in my estimation should be continued by the legislative department of the government. The state board of education is a very valuable part of this system of education. It outlines the general educational policy, and its duties and powers should be increased rather than decreased. The state superintendent is practically the executive officer of the state board of education. He should be in the field, visiting the schools, and not compelled to remain in the office to do clerical work. This may also be said of the county superintendents. My experience in the past has convinced me that our superintendents are very

worthy, honorable, competent, painstaking, and ambitious officers—ambitious for the schools. Their faithfulness and self-sacrifice are to be most highly commended.

In conclusion, I cannot refrain from expressing a word of thanks to the teachers of Oklahoma for their uniform, hearty, and worthy support in all matters of administration in the past six years. My term of office expired with the past year, as a result of my voluntary resignation; and go with the most pleasant memories and the highest word of commendation and appreciation for the great body of teachers who have done and are doing so much for the future commonwealth of Oklahoma. May their labors in the future be as effective in the development of a citizenship and a commonwealth as they have been in the past! May the blessing of heaven rest upon each and every one of them. May the rose and daisy ever bloom in their pathway.

Thomas Jefferson said of his Scotch professor, William Small: "He was the man who fixed the destinies of my life." You, my friends, the school teachers of Oklahoma, are to fix the destinies of our 225,000 growing youth of Oklahoma, the future citizens of our beloved commonwealth and of our greatly revered nation. They will be the dominant factors tomorrow. May they all be "men, high-minded men; men who their duties know, and knowing dare perform;" and thus by their workmanship prove the labors of the master-minds who fixed their destinies—the school-teachers of Oklahoma.